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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 000873

SIPDIS

FREETOWN FOR MCCONNELL AND BELLAMY

E.O. 12598: DECLAS 4/19/11

TAGS: PREL MASS MARR NI SL

SUBJECT: Operation FOCUS RELIEF Roundtable

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 23.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Nigerian Minister of Defense Danjuma chaired an Operation FOCUS RELIEF(OFR) round-table meeting on April 19. The Minister took the role of facilitator in the almost-two hour meeting, restating and clarifying various concerns raised by both sides. General Malu was unrepentant regarding his untenable focus on equipment rather than the bilateral defense relationship. However, in the end, the participants agreed that: there was a need for a MOU to clarify all issues related to OFR; on Wednesday, April 25, a U.S. Nigerian team would travel to the identified training sites to look at the Chief of Army Staff's proposed billeting areas for the U.S. soldiers; the length of deployment of the Nigerian battalions to Sierra Leone will be one year. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) Nigerian Minister of Defense, LTG Theophilus Y. Danjuma (Rtd), chaired an Operation FOCUS RELIEF round-table meeting on April 19. In attendance on the Nigerian side were: Minister Danjuma, Chief of Army Staff LTG Victor Malu, Chief of Defense Staff Vice Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi, a representative of the Air Force, a representative from the Office of the MOD Permanent Secretary, and Danjuma's Personal Staff Officer Col Ichyaku Pennap. On the U.S. side were: Ambassador Jeter, PDAS-D McConnell, PDAS-S/AF Bellamy, BG Fuller, A/DCM, DATT, OSD AF Deputy Director, OSD Nigeria Desk Officer Ikins, JCS representative Captain Richard Heimmerle, and PolMilooff (notetaker).

¶4. (C) After a 30 minute small-group meeting (including only the Ambassador, the Minister, Mr. McConnell and Mr. Bellamy), Danjuma invited the American side to explain its concerns. Ambassador Jeter said that the meeting should serve to look at the necessary preparations for OFR Phase 3, including the issues of basing, length of deployment, and end-use for equipment transfers.

¶5. (C) McConnell began by noting that a meeting between the Nigerian and American Presidents would occur in early May. He said that the meeting would, no doubt, include a discussion of the bilateral defense relationship, and that he was confident that the Presidents would be looking to the future growth of that relationship. That is why it was imperative to ensure commonality of purpose in this core aspect of the relationship. McConnell explained that Phase 3 (P3) was slated to begin on August 27, but that preparations would have to begin very soon. He noted that Phase 2 (P2), which includes Ghana and Senegal, would commence on May 29, and added that in those two countries, U.S. soldiers would be housed with their host battalions. He explained that the U.S. required this arrangement to meet force protection requirements, and because this would allow the American and West African soldiers to interact and learn from each other, both during and outside of training. He strongly emphasized that this was a mutual training and learning experience. In terms of basing, he said, the U.S. would like P3 in Nigeria look like P2 in Senegal and Ghana. He explained that the U.S. was not necessarily requesting that the American soldiers live inside Nigerian barracks, but inside of the perimeter of battalion bases. General Fuller agreed, and noted that living alongside of their fellow soldiers was a Special Forces tradition and suited their philosophy for joint exercises and operations.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador noted that it would be a good idea to have an "off-site" for officers from the Special Forces team and the Nigeria battalion participating in OFR P3 before P3 began. This would allow the officers to get to know each other on a personal basis, generate mutual understanding, and would also give the Special Forces soldiers a chance to learn Nigerian culture from their

hosts. Ambassador Jeter offered Embassy assistance for such a meeting. (COMMENT: There seemed to be general MOD civilian support for this idea, though Malu and Ogohi remained silent. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (C) Malu then addressed his concerns, first by noting that he believed the misunderstandings in Phase 1 (P1) occurred because the training did not take place as originally envisioned. The Nigerian Army, he said, was appreciative of and excited by the U.S. offer of assistance. However, the Service Chiefs had wanted to know what equipment would be supplied (he said that the equipment list for P1 was not passed to them until the training began), and had expected the training to focus on equipment not regularly found in the Nigeria inventory.

¶8. (C) Malu emphasized that, while grateful for the offer to equip the battalions, he had expected the U.S. to provide the type of logistical support his ECOMOG forces had received in Liberia through PA&E. He objected to training in tactics because he did not want five Nigerian battalions that had a different doctrine than the rest of the Army. He added that, when a Nigerian battalion is selected for peacekeeping duty, they are already given three months to train and prepare for the mission. For P3, Malu noted, the training should be based on the equipment that would be provided, and that equipment should be items that the Nigerian Army does not already have (he explained that the Army has plenty of rifles, but needed more items like machine guns and RPG:).

¶9. (C) The Minister then asked Malu to address the issue of co-locating the soldiers. Malu said he would not mind locating space "outside the barracks", and allowing the U.S. to assess the locations for security.

¶10. (C) McConnell responded that the equipment for P3 would be the same as P1. He explained that this had been discussed before P1 had begun, and was based on limited U.S. resources (USD 90 million) to fund OFR for seven West African battalions (including the cost of equipment and the soldiers). The U.S. had agreed to weapons and equipment for individual soldiers, crew served weapons (machine guns and mortars), communications gear, medical equipment and vehicles. Moreover, the equipment was selected with attention given to compatibility with Nigerian Army equipment. There had never been any U.S. suggestion of equipping to UN scale, McConnell added. The training and equipment "had to be a package deal," because the USG was unable to provide lethal assistance without training and still meet Congressional concerns. Finally, McConnell said, there was certainly a benefit to soldiers being together, interacting, and exercising together, regardless of the equipment or POI. OFR was in the national interest of both countries, and deserved support.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador explained to General Malu that the kind of support he had received in Liberia from the U.S. was still available, but in Sierra Leone it would be provided by the UN. OFR, the Ambassador noted, should be looked at as the beginning of a process to build capacity in the sub-region to deal with conflict as well as natural disasters. This went beyond ACRI, he said. McConnell noted that ACRI was moving from State to DOD, and the U.S. would seek Nigeria's feedback on ACRI thus far. ACRI would have to make sense to Nigeria, McConnell said, because Nigeria was a critical component.

¶12. (C) Malu returned to Liberia, and noted that PA&E support there had been extremely important. He added that if he had had the choice of the PA&E support or an equal amount of money, he would have chosen PA&E. He asked why the U.S. was not giving PA&E support to Nigeria now? McConnell responded that constantly using PA&E would not allow for the growth of the bilateral defense relationship. In that case, Malu said, it would be better to give Nigeria additional course vacancies through IMET, and then try to do joint exercises in the future when the Nigerian Army would be better prepared to participate. He added that every battalion slated for OFR had been to either Liberia or Sierra Leone at least three times (implying a high level of tactical combat experience and no need for additional training).

¶13. (C) Minister Danjuma noted that General Malu was arguing that if the current equipment scale was maintained, then the POI should be shorter. General Fuller stated that the POI could be reviewed, but he did not believe it could, or necessarily should, be shorter. Moreover, EUCOM had reviewed the P1 POI, and had already incorporated suggestions from the Nigerian battalions who had

participated. Finally, the POI was not just about the equipment, but also about interaction of the soldiers. McConnell reiterated that he believed both Nigerian and American soldiers had gained a great deal in P1, and rhetorically asked, "What is the downside to joint training?"

¶14. (C) Chief of Defense Staff Ogohi then identified four areas of concern: (a) If OFR training was just for Sierra Leone-bound units, or if other Nigerian soldiers could gain from it; (b) the need for a MOU; (c) his concern that the UN mandate in Sierra Leone could end and that therefore, August was a late starting date; and, (d) that basing had to be decided by the Chief of Army Staff, and that the Nigerian Army would provide for security. McConnell agreed on the need for a MOU, and offered to provide a draft document to the MOD. On the UN mandate, McConnell explained that no one could tell the future. August had been selected because of the time needed for preparations. The Ambassador added that Nigeria was in P3 because the U.S. could not get the necessary answers to put Nigeria in P2 starting in May. Moreover, McConnell pointed out, while OFR was just a piece of the bilateral defense arrangement, OFR could be used as an opportunity to demonstrate to the U.S. Congress the validity of expanding the overall defense relationship. On basing, McConnell said he understood from earlier comments that Nigeria had agreed that the U.S. soldiers could live on the bases outside of the actual barracks, that is, working the base perimeter.

¶15. (C) General Malu then returned to his concern that five Nigerian battalions would learn different tactics and doctrine than the rest of the Army. General Fuller explained that while this was ultimately a Nigerian decision, the training was not on peacekeeping skills but on combat operations, and that most of the skills could be easily transferred. We will move quickly and finish early if standards are met, General Fuller added.

¶16. (C) The Minister then said that the length of deployment would be for one year, which was then confirmed by Malu and Ogohi. Returning to basing, the Minister suggested that a team of Nigerians and Americans go to the sites and see if the U.S. could accept the sites chosen by the Army. The Ambassador pointed out that four bases were under discussion (three with the battalions and the forward operating base (FOB) in Abuja), and asked if site surveys had already been done. Colonel Nelson affirmed that surveys had been done, that he had sent a letter requesting use of the FOB, and plans had been drawn up. He had believed that the notion of a "base-within-a-base" had been accepted, but then learned that it had not seen.

¶17. (C) General Malu returned the discussion to the POI, and said that the Army should give input into the POI. General Fuller explained that the POI had in fact been negotiated last summer, but that it could be reviewed again. However, he did not see much flexibility in adjusting the length of the POI. McConnell agreed that the length of the POI could not be changed, but that changes in the actual instruction could be discussed. Malu again noted his concerns regarding doctrine, stating that the Commanding Officers from P1 had expressed concern about the POI changing Army doctrine. McConnell responded that the POI focused on small unit tactics, not on doctrine. Fuller added that the ideas of the Commanding Officers of the battalions from P1 had been integrated into the newest version of the POI. He noted that he would be happy to meet with the Commanding Officers of the remaining three battalions and incorporate their ideas.

¶18. (C) Bellamy then addressed General Malu's comments about the equipment, clarifying that it had already been determined that the equipment in P3 would be the same as P1. General Malu again stated that he would have liked to replace the rifles (of which the Army has enough) with more machine guns or RPGs. (DAO COMMENT: Despite Malu's comments, Nigerian Army rifles are generally in very poor condition and not fit for combat. END DAO COMMENT.)

¶19. (C) The Minister then summarized the meeting, which he described as very useful. He noted that that:

- There is a need for a MOU to clarify equipment and other issues
- On Wednesday, April 25, a Nigerian and a USG representative would travel to the bases to look at the Chief of Army Staff's proposed basing options for the U.S. soldiers. He added that adjustments could be made to

General Malu's proposals.

- Deployment of the Nigerian battalions to Sierra Leone will be for one year.

¶20. (C) Finally, the Ambassador raised the issue of the trucks provided in Nigeria to the battalions during P1, which had not been shipped to Sierra Leone as agreed. The Minister instructed General Malu to look into the trucks.

¶21. (C) COMMENT: A number of positive conclusions were reached in the meeting, including length of deployment and a clear acknowledgement of U.S. concerns for force protection. Moreover, a clearing of the air on various issues was certainly healthy.

¶22. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Minister Danjuma was impressive. The normally reserved Minister took control of the discussion at a number of points, redirecting the discussion to the key issues at hand. However, it was also clear that he was hesitant to force a confrontation with Malu or Ogochi. The ultimate test of wills will come during the inspection of the proposed sites for bases for U.S. trainers. OFR P3 for Nigeria could still collapse if General Malu's notions do not meet with U.S. requirements, and the U.S. inspectors are required to reject the options he offers. Malu certainly understands this. In this case, we will see how far the Nigerian political decision-makers are willing to enforce their authority to continue a program they clearly support.

¶23. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post faxed a draft MOU to AF/W and AF/RA for an initial review. The document was reviewed and edited in Abuja by PDAS-D McConnell, PDAS-S/AF Bellamy and General Fuller. Post requests quick coordination by the Department to provide a draft MOU that we can forward to the Minister for his comment. END ACTION REQUEST.

¶24. (U) This cable was not cleared by PDAS-D McConnell, PDAS-S/AF Bellamy, or General Fuller.

¶25. (U) Freetown minimize considered.

JETER